

Testimony by Rep. Frank R. Wolf
Before the Virginia State Corporation Commission
January 30, 2007
Loudoun County Government Center

Members of the Commission, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement on the proposal pending before the State Corporation Commission to raise the tolls on the Dulles Greenway. As you know, the owners of the Greenway, Toll Road Investors Partnership II – also known as TRIP II – has requested approval to increase the toll on the 14-mile road from today's rate of \$2.70 to \$4 on January 1, 2009. Additional increases would move the toll to \$4.50 on July 1, 2010, and to \$4.80 on January 1, 2012.

This is an issue of critical importance in my congressional district. It directly affects thousands of my constituents who use the Dulles Greenway as a daily commuter route and who could face a serious financial burden should the proposed increases be permitted.

Mr. Chairman, the Virginia Highway Corporation Act states three conditions which would allow a toll increase:

- It must be reasonable to the user in relation to the benefit obtained;
- It should not discourage the use of the roadway by the public;
- AND, it should provide the operator with a reasonable rate of return.

To any fair-minded person looking at the facts, I believe TRIP II's request fails to meet any of these conditions.

The major alternative to the Dulles Greenway is Route 7, which, according to VDOT, is operating today at service 'Level F' during rush hour. VDOT defines 'Level F' as 'forced traffic flow in which the amount of traffic approaching a point exceeds the amount that can be served. Level of service 'F' is characterized as stop-and-go waves, poor travel times, low comfort and convenience and increased accident exposure.'

Predictions are that Route 7 traffic will become even worse in the near future. In addition, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Department recently announced the most dangerous intersections in Loudoun County, six of which are on Route 7. Raising the toll on the Greenway will push more traffic onto Route 7, making an already dismal commute even worse.

If the tolls are raised as proposed, the Dulles Greenway would be one of the most expensive toll roads in the country, equating to 34 cents-per-mile to drive the entire length of the road at a toll of \$4.80. And for a driver who pays at the main Greenway toll gate and takes the first exit at Route 606 – about a mile on the road – the toll is the same as driving the entire length. In 2012, under the proposed toll hike, that driver would pay \$4.80 per mile and others who don't use the entire length of the toll would be socked with a much higher rate than 34 cents-per-mile.

Let me share some comparisons with other toll roads across the country:

* I-95 in Maryland	5 cents per-mile
* The New Jersey Turnpike	Less than 6 cents per-mile
* Indiana Toll Road	Less than 3 cents per-mile
(Owned by the same overseas company that owns the Greenway)	
* Powhite Parkway in Virginia	14 cents per-mile
* Massachusetts Turnpike	Less than 5 cents per-mile
* Pennsylvania Turnpike	Less than 6 cents per-mile

I believe the owners of the Greenway are taking advantage of the fact that the Greenway is for many in northern Virginia the only commuter route they can use without sitting in gridlocked traffic. From the beginning, this road was to be a public/private partnership. Today, there is no public in this partnership. The owners don't live here. TRIP II is owned by Macquarie Bank of Australia. Their families and neighbors don't use the Greenway. This company is ambitiously buying toll roads across

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our country, and in order to make a profit, it has turned to aggressive tolling on the backs of the driving public. I have heard reports that this company says it is losing money on the Greenway and that's why it needs to raise the tolls. A review of the company's Web site reveals that Macquarie Bank made more than \$1.1 billion Australian dollars in 2005.

I just don't believe that allowing this company to turn the Greenway into a cash cow is what a public/private partnership should be. The thought 'price gouging' comes to mind.

According to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Dulles Greenway averages 64,000 trips per day. The current toll of \$2.70 equates to more than \$172,800 per day or \$63 million per year in revenue for TRIP II. If the number of trips per day on this road remained static – which any fair-minded person knows will not be the case – total annual revenue generated for TRIP II based on a \$4.80 toll would be more than \$112 million per year. That would be an almost 100 percent increase in revenue over a six-year period.

I believe it is important to note that the AAA (the American Automobile Association), the Dulles Chamber of Commerce, the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce and the Dulles Area Association of Realtors, have all publicly stated their opposition to this proposed rate hike. In addition, the Loudoun Board of Supervisors, the Leesburg Town Council and the Purcellville Town Council have each passed resolutions opposing the increase. All of these groups have raised a point that should resonate with everyone: other commuters in most of Virginia do not have to pay a toll to commute to and from work. But many commuters who live west of the Washington Metropolitan Area have little choice but to take the Greenway. These commuters are being unfairly singled-out and any action that would almost double the cost for a round-trip on the Greenway for these drivers should be denied.

I'm sure many northern Virginia residents looked at the cost of commuting and paying tolls when deciding where to live. Commuters today who use the Greenway 50 weeks-per-year pay \$1,350 annually for their weekday round trips on the Greenway.

If the State Corporation Commission approves TRIP II's requested increase, in 2012, the same commuter will pay \$2,400 per year, almost triple the cost since 1995 when the road was built, just to use the Greenway every day. Most family budgets, rightly so, would not factor in a 100 percent increase in commuting costs over six years. Is that a fair return on the cost of owning this road?

There is no way most commuters can budget for a 100 percent increase in toll costs. Many will be forced to make a financial sacrifice in order to continue using this road or choose an alternative route. Alternative routes for many commuters will mean less time with their family and less time doing things preferable to sitting in traffic.

I believe raising the Greenway toll to \$4.80 as proposed for a one-way trip by the year 2012 is nothing more than highway robbery, and I urge the State Corporation Commission to reject this request.

Members of the commission, I respectfully ask that you put yourself in the driver's seat of these local commuters. What would an extra 30 minutes each way added to your daily commute mean to your quality of life as an individual or family member? How would you feel if you were sitting in traffic while your son's Little League game was being played? Perhaps you would be forced to car pool because only your spouse could use the Greenway because of today's toll costs. What if you were a single mom who couldn't use a car pool to save on daycare costs? This increase would double the burden on a single-parent family. You would have no other option. You would be held hostage by the Greenway.

Again, I do not believe TRIP II has met the three criteria set by law to raise tolls.

Let me close by saying I do appreciate the commission holding this hearing in Loudoun to allow the people directly affected the opportunity to tell you about the detrimental effect the requested toll increase on the Dulles Greenway will have for them and other daily commuters in northern Virginia."